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 THE WASHINGTON STAR
 18 November 1978

Soviets Deny Nuclear-Type MiG-23s in Cuba

MOSCOW (AP) — The Soviet Union acknowledged yesterday that high-performance fighter jets of the same type as MiG-23 aircraft are present in Cuba.

A Pravda newspaper commentary carried by the Tass news agency in advance of publication cited U.S. press reports that the presence of such aircraft runs counter to a 1962 agreement that the Soviet Union would not introduce aircraft with nuclear capability into Cuba.

"Such allegations are groundless and provocative from beginning to end," said the commentary quoted from the Communist Party daily.

"By its basic performance characteristics, these (MiG-23s) are planes of the same type which were and are present in Cuba, have and remain indispensable for protecting the legitimate interests of this sovereign state," it said.

Two days ago the State Department said it was investigating reports that MiG-23 "Flogger" jets were present in Cuba. Some types of these aircraft are believed by U.S. intelligence to be capable of firing tactical nuclear weapons as well as conventional arms.

President Carter has ordered SR-71 "Blackbird" reconnaissance jets over Cuba to help find out whether recently arrived Soviet MiG fighters can carry nuclear weapons, administration sources said yesterday.

It was not known if the planes were the latest MiG-23 model that can carry nuclear weapons, or an earlier version limited to air-to-air dog-fights.

Sources said Carter ordered limited flights by the Blackbirds about two weeks ago. The planes, named for their dark paint, fly at speeds of 2,000 m.p.h. and take pictures that can show details as small as a man from 17 miles up.

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